

REMARKS

This Amendment is submitted in response to the Office Action dated May 18, 2005. The Applicants have amended Claims 17 and 18. No new subject matter has been added to the Claims. Please charge Deposit Account No. 02-1818 for any insufficiency or credit for any overpayment in connection with this Amendment.

The Office Action rejected Claims 17-20 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,894,717 to Yamashita et al. ("Yamashita"). Yamashita discloses a mulching mower having a cutter housing 5. The cutter housing 5 has a flat upper wall 19 and a side wall 20 which hangs down from the peripheral edge of the upper wall 19. "In addition, the interior of the cutter housing 5 is also opened rearwardly through an opening 21 formed at a rear end face part of the side wall 20" (Yamushita, Column 8, Lines 54-59). As stated in Yamushita:

Since the side wall 20 of the cutter housing 5 has an opening 21 at the rear, the mulching mower can be easily converted into a rear discharge type mower, if necessary, by removing the detachable rear enclosure wall portion 38. In this case, the separator members 45 act to smoothly guide the grass clippings to the opening 21 so that no interference occurs between the grass clippings on the side of the cutter blade 24a and those on the side of the cutter blade 24b (Column 11, Lines 50-57).

As illustrated in Fig. 4 of Yamushita, the v-shaped detachable rear enclosure wall portion 38 is connected to an inner portion of the overall cutter housing 5. The detachable rear enclosure wall portion 38 is not connected to the outermost rear end face part of the side wall 20 where the opening 21 is located.

The Applicants have amended Claim 17 to overcome such rejection. Amended Claim 17 (and Claims 18-20 which depend therefrom) are directed to a mower deck including a top surface, a cutting blade rotatably supported beneath the top surface and at least one sidewall depending from the top surface and forming a cutting chamber within which the blade rotates. The sidewall includes a front portion and a rear portion. The rear portion has an interior surface that defines a portion of the cutting chamber, and the rear portion has an outermost exterior surface. The outermost exterior surface has: (i) a wall that extends substantially vertically downward from the top surface; and (ii) a material director defining a discharge opening. The mower deck also includes an insert attachable to the outermost exterior surface. The insert is configured to block the discharge opening when the insert is attached to the outermost exterior surface. The mower deck includes at least one fastener operable to attach the insert to the

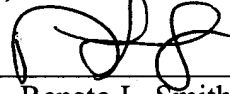
outermost exterior surface adjacent to the discharge opening, wherein a portion of the fastener is positioned adjacent to the outermost exterior surface of the rear portion of the sidewall. Yamashita does not disclose such a mower deck. In particular, Yamashita does not disclose such an outermost exterior surface. Furthermore, Yamashita does not disclose an insert attachable to such outermost exterior surface, where the insert is configured to block the discharge opening when the insert is attached to the outermost exterior surface. Accordingly, the Applicants respectfully submit that Claims 17-20 are in condition for allowance.

An earnest endeavor has been made to place this application in condition for formal allowance and is courteously solicited. If the Examiner has any questions regarding this Amendment, the Applicants respectfully request that the Examiner contact the undersigned.

Respectfully submitted,

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